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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, church. Turn with me in your Bibles to Genesis chapter 2. It's probably on page 2 in your Bible. Probably whatever kind of Bible you have, it's page 2. We'll be reading chapter 2, verses 4 to 17 this morning. This week and next week, we're looking at Genesis chapter 2. Next week, Pastor Matt will look at the second part, verses 18 to 25, focusing on God making us for relationship and particularly God's gift of marriage. But today, we're looking at the first half of chapter 2, starting at verse 4. So let me read these verses for us. Genesis chapter 2, starting at verse 4.

These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens. When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the land and there was no man to work the ground and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground. Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living creature.

And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden in the east and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden and there it divided and became four rivers.

The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah where there is gold. And the gold of that land is good. Bidellium and onyx stone are there.

The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush. And the name of the third river is the Tigris which flows east of Assyria and the fourth river is the Euphrates. The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

[2 : 2 0] And the Lord God commanded the man saying you may surely eat of every tree in the garden. But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die. Is there a God who genuinely cares about human beings?

If you look around at the world as it is today and if you rely simply on human reason and experience the answer to that question is not so clear. Now the vast majority of human beings throughout history have believed in some kind of God or gods. Many philosophers have reasoned that the universe must have a first cause. Others have argued from our sense of morality that there must be some source of our moral inclinations. Many of us have listened to a piece of music or looked upon crashing ocean waves or snow-capped mountains, gazed upon a newborn baby or a cherished loved one with a sense of wonder and gratitude and amazement. The world is a fascinating and sometimes awe-inspiring place. Human beings seem to have an instinct to believe in something even if we can't figure out or define exactly what it is but does this something or someone actually care about us? The world contains awe-inspiring beauty but it can also seem scary, unpredictable, hostile, or just indifferent.

In the ancient world almost everyone believed that the gods were prone to be angry with human beings and they needed somehow to be appeased. In the modern world many people believe that God is remote and removed from our everyday human experience. Is there a God who truly cares? Now the ancient Israelites for whom the book of Genesis was originally written would have faced this very same question.

Their lives hadn't been easy. They'd experienced the trauma of dehumanizing slavery. Then they had to deal with the hardships of living life in the desert along with the uncertainties of the future. And the nations around them told stories about gods who were fickle and unpredictable just like humans often are. But the book of Genesis tells a very different story.

Genesis tells the story of a God who from the very beginning cares deeply for his human creatures. What we'll see in the verses we're looking at this morning is that the God who made the world and everything in it cares about us. And I want us to consider this theme this morning in three parts.

[5 : 26] God cares about us because he made us intimately. Second, God cares for us because he provides for us generously. And three, God cares for us because he instructs us wisely. Those are three reasons that Genesis shows us or three expressions of God's tender and personal care for us as human beings.

So the first point, God is for us. God cares for us because he made us intimately. We see this in verses four to seven. Now verse four is an introduction to this section. These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created. It's the first of 10 such headings in Genesis.

And they all begin with that phrase. These are the generations of so-and-so. This one is unusual because it refers to the heavens and the earth. All the others refer to individual people such as Adam, Noah, and Abraham. But in every case, the heading refers back to someone or something that has already come into existence that has already been mentioned in the previous section of Genesis. In this case, the heavens and the earth, God creates in chapter one, verse one, and then it points forward to what will be generated by that something or someone. So the phrase could also be translated, these are the offspring of the heavens and the earth. So chapters two through four are not a second account of God creating the heavens and the earth as he did in chapter one. They're a fuller development, showing us what comes forth from the heavens and the earth as God continues to be involved with them.

You might say that Genesis one has provided us with the wide angle panoramic view and Genesis two is the close up zoomed in view of what develops. Dietrich Bonhoeffer many years ago observed that Genesis one is written from above, from God's point of view. From Genesis one, which we've looked at the last two weeks, we've seen that God is transcendent and sovereign before all things, above all things, the one for whom and through whom all things exist and human beings exist for God, to bear God's image, to display God's glory. Genesis two, by contrast, is written from below, from an earthly point of view.

The camera angle zooms in and we see the man form from the dust. We see the garden with its abundant fullness and we see the instruction given to the garden's caretaker. Bonhoeffer put it this way, in Genesis one, we find man for God. In Genesis two, we have God for man. There we see the creator and Lord here, the God who is near and fatherly. God cares for us. God is for us. You see, some people have tried to pit these two chapters against each other, Genesis one and Genesis two, as if they contradict each other or if they're at odds with one another. But in order to see who the God of the Bible really is, we need both of these chapters. They complement each other. They shed light on each other. Genesis one, if you've noticed, refers to God about 35 times. The Hebrew word is Elohim.

[8 : 55] It's a word that emphasizes God's majesty and God's authority over all creation. And you know, it's right for us to begin there. Genesis does not begin by saying, God loves you and really wants you to be happy. No. Genesis begins with a rather more bracing message.

This world isn't about you primarily. It's about God, the eternally wise ruler of all things. God is God and you are not. And unless you understand that, nothing else in the Bible will make sense.

But Genesis two takes it one step further. Starting in chapter two, verse four, it doesn't just speak about God. It speaks about the Lord God. Hebrew words are Yahweh Elohim. See, Yahweh is the covenant name for God, the name by which God revealed himself to Moses at the burning bush. It's a word that means I am or even I am here.

It's a name God used when he wanted to say to his people, I am with you. I am for you. I will rescue you and I will never, ever leave you. Now, this is not a different God. He's still the one true God over all the earth, but he's also the Lord who is near to us, who is for us, who has bound himself to us by his promise. He is, as Jesus says, our heavenly father who made us intimately. Look in particular at verse seven. The Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. What an amazingly intimate picture. The Lord of the universe giving shape to our human bodies like a potter shaping the clay with his very own hands, fashioning it into something beautiful. And then coming face to face with us, awakening us with a kiss, breathing into us his very own life giving spirit. What an amazingly intimate picture of God's love. And this is not only true of the first human beings ages ago, God has been intimately involved in making you.

Job chapter 10, verse 8 to 12 says, your hands fashioned and made me like clay. Did you not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese? You clothed me with skin and flesh and knit me together with bones and sinews. You have granted me life and steadfast love and your care has preserved my spirit. Or Psalm 139, which we read earlier this morning. You formed my inward parts.

[12 : 00] You knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you for I'm fearfully and wonderfully made, intricately woven together in the depths of the earth. Take time to study. Take time to meditate how each one of our bodies developed from the tiniest microscopic beginnings within our mother's womb into the people who we are today. This is cause for wonder and worship, love and praise.

God made us intimately. And therefore our bodies matter deeply. Now it's not because our bodies are made out of particularly special materials.

We're made out of very, excuse me, very ordinary stuff. Dust from the ground. In verse 19, the animals too are formed out of the ground. In fact, there's a play on words in the Hebrew. The word for man or humanity, Adam, which is also the name of Adam, sounds like the word for ground, Adamah. It's as if God was, in English, probably the closest thing we have is earthling from the earth. Our bodies are ordinary and fragile. They're not inherently indestructible.

They are not in themselves something that we can boast about. And yet God has breathed his very own life into our human bodies. He has raised us from the dust to reign over creation. Sometimes we refer to this as being created body and soul. And that's appropriate. But I think the emphasis here above all is on the unity of the human person. The formed body filled with God's life-giving spirit. God does not create a human soul separate from a human body here. From the very beginning, we see God's intention to make his dwelling place within our human bodies.

And that's why the New Testament says your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. A sacred space in which God himself has come to dwell.

[14:30] So what we do with our bodies matters to God very much. How we treat one another's bodies matters to God very much. We'll see later in chapter 2 that this includes what we do with our bodies in the specifically male or female way that God has made us. But we'll get to that next week.

So first, God is for us because he made us intimately. That's the first point. Second point is that God is for us because he provides for us generously. We see this in verses 8 to 14. Verse 8, the Lord God planted a garden. Again, the Lord is portrayed as getting his hands dirty.

Now, this was a major contrast with all of the gods of the surrounding nations in the ancient world. You see, the gods of the surrounding nations despised manual labor. In fact, one of the creation stories from the ancient Near East talks about the gods creating human beings to do their dirty work, to do the work they didn't want to do. In particular, anything that involved manual labor and repetitive tasks and things like that. But the God of the Bible is not an elitist. The God of the Bible does not only value professional kinds of jobs. Cultivating the ground, painting a house, changing a diaper, cleaning an office. These are honorable tasks in the sight of God.

The Lord of heaven himself did not shrink back from washing his disciples' feet. Here, the Lord God planted a garden and cultivated it for the good of humanity. Our heavenly Father didn't throw us into a howling wilderness or a ferocious jungle, but in his mercy and generosity, he made us a delightful home. Notice the contrast between the description of the land in verses 5 and 6 and the description of the garden in verses 8 through 14.

Verses 5 and 6 describe a wasteland. No desert shrubs, no edible crops. Why? Well, there's no rain and there's no farmer. You see, in order to get crops, everybody in the ancient world knew this, you need two things. You need God to send the rain, because human beings can't make that happen in the rain. You need a forest. You need a forest. You need a forest. You need a forest. You need a forest.

[17:18] But in verses 5 and 6, there's neither. Instead, there's what verse 6 calls a mist, or perhaps that may be better translated as a spring or a flood, even watering the face of the ground. So, the land is a watery waste, not a hospitable place to live. The description in verses 5 and 6 might even remind us of chapter 1, verse 2, which talks about the earth being formless and empty and dark. Now, verses 5 and 6 aren't necessarily a comprehensive statement about the condition of the entire earth from the very beginning of time until human beings come on the scene. They're most likely simply a description of the local context leading up to verse 7. But in contrast to the wasteland of verses 5 and 6, verses 8 through 14 describe a fruitful garden. The Hebrew word Eden, where the garden is planted, means delight or pleasure. It's a garden of paradise, a luxurious park, a royal forest full of trees that are not only useful and nourishing, but also beautiful, pleasing to the eye, including the tree of life itself.

Further, the garden was amply watered by a river, natural irrigation, another big benefit from the perspective of people who were living much of their lives in the desert. It was exactly the place you'd want to live. And this river also provided access to precious metals, including gold, and it flowed out from Eden to the rest of the earth. It was the hub of everything. Now, many people have puzzled over the description of the rivers in verses 10 through 14. The last two rivers mentioned, the Tigris and the Euphrates, were two of the most powerful rivers in the ancient Near East, so they joined together and empty into the Persian Gulf. The names of the first two rivers, however, are not mentioned elsewhere, so scholars have made various guesses about what they might refer to, perhaps the Nile in Egypt or some smaller rivers east of the Tigris. But if we see verses 10 through 14 as a set of obscure clues about the geographical location of Eden, I think we're missing the point. After Genesis 3, human beings no longer have access to the garden. Figuring out its original geographic location would give us absolutely no help. So what are verses 10 to 14 trying to show us? Well, Ezekiel chapter 28 verse 14, a later poetic description, speaks of Eden as the holy mountain of God. Now, if Eden is a mountain, then here's the picture that we have from verses 10 to 14. A river originating from the mountain of God,

God's palace, watering the garden of God, God's temple where he dwells with human beings, and branching out from there to the four corners of the earth. Rivers sometimes diverge naturally, but they almost never do so near their source in the mountains. So verses 14 aren't merely describing an ordinary natural phenomenon, they're describing a supernatural river of heavenly life flowing out from the garden of God to the ends of the earth. And if that picture is right, then we can see a progression, a gradual progression in these verses. Verse 7, God breathes his life-giving spirit into the man. God comes to inhabit and dwell in our very own bodies. But then God doesn't stop there, he makes a home for us where we can dwell with him. He plants a fruitful garden where we can enjoy fellowship with him, a place of complete security, abundant provision, and joyful union.

But he doesn't stop there either. From that garden, God's people are to convey his presence and declare his praise to the ends of the earth as far as the rivers run.

Derek Kidner put it this way, the Lord God's provision is a model of parental care. The man is sheltered but not smothered. He is given ample nourishment for his aesthetic, physical, and spiritual appetites. On all sides, discoveries and encounters await him.

[21 : 59] There is work set before him for body and mind. You see, the Garden of Eden was not only a place of safety and security in God's presence, it was also the beginning of God's great adventure for the human race.

You know, the life that Genesis describes before sin entered the world was not boring or static or confined or lacking in potential for growth. No.

Back in chapter 1, verse 28, God blessed human beings and said, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and spread the garden.

Fill the earth with the knowledge and love and praise of God. We actually see a similar progression in the New Testament.

How does God start his work? Well, he breathes new life into us. We come alive to Jesus. We see him for who he is and we treasure him and he comes to dwell in us by his spirit.

[23 : 05] But God doesn't leave us alone as individuals. No, he brings us into his family, into the church, into a garden where we can feed on him and receive his good gifts and cultivate them and be strengthened by his grace.

And then he sends us out to the world to take what we found here in Jesus and bring it to the rest of the world. Jesus came to his disciples after his resurrection and said to them, Peace be with you.

As the Father has sent me, so I send you. And then he breathed on them and said, Receive the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one who equips us, who fills us with God's peace, and who equips us for the mission that God has given us.

Let me tell you, you will never find a better mission in life than the one that Jesus Christ has given to his people. Nothing is more meaningful.

Nothing is more lasting. Nothing is more ultimately exciting and satisfying than receiving the love of Jesus and going forth in the power of the Holy Spirit. Don't settle for pursuing any lesser purpose than God's.

[24 : 26] God is for us because he made us intimately. God is for us because he provides for us generously. And finally, we see God is for us because he instructs us wisely.

God is for us because he is not for us. God is for us. Verses 15 to 17. You see, in order to enjoy fellowship with God and in order to carry out the mission of God, we must listen to God's wise instruction.

Verse 16 and 17, we see God's first command, his first word to the man. You may surely eat of every tree of the garden.

But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat for in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die. Now, for many of us, this is the hardest part of the passage to see as a good thing from a God who is for us.

We say, okay, God made us intimately. Yes, I can see the goodness of that. God provides for us abundantly. Yes, I can see the goodness of that. But what are God's commands?

[25 : 34] His law? His rules? See, we've been conditioned to ask questions like, why did God put the tree in the garden if they weren't supposed to eat from it and if he knew they would eat from it anyway?

Or was it actually a step up to eat from the tree of knowledge rather than remain in blissful ignorance? Such questions are very common, but at the same time, they are profoundly misguided.

We've already seen that the life God gave to humanity in Eden was not boring. He gave them a commission to spread life to the ends of the earth.

But let me address God's command by saying three things to help us see, I think, the goodness of God's command here. First, God's command begins with a broad permission.

You may surely eat, literally eating, you may eat of every tree in the garden. God's first word is not a no, but a yes. God richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

[26 : 46] You see, whenever we struggle with something that God says no to, we need to ask ourselves, what good things has God said yes to that we are ignoring and neglecting to receive?

If we're starving ourselves by refusing to take part in the meal that God has laid out for us, in his word, in his spirit, in community, then of course we'll feel hungry for the forbidden fruit.

Because we're focusing on God's single prohibition and neglecting the broad freedom that he has given us in Jesus Christ. So God's command begins with a broad and generous permission.

Second, God's boundaries are good and even necessary for our creaturely existence. Verse 15 tells us God installed the man as the garden's caretaker.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. Now the same verbs appear in Numbers chapter 3, verses 7 to 10. There, they are translated minister and guard, but they are the same words, work or serve or minister and keep or guard or protect.

[28 : 03] They're used in Numbers, though, to describe the task of the priests. So just as the priests were supposed to take care of God's house in the Old Testament, the man here is supposed to take care of God's garden.

And his job as God's priest is to cultivate the garden, to bring out its fullness, and to guard it against any potential intruders. God left him in charge.

And so he gave him wide latitude. Eat of any tree in the garden. However, as the rightful maker and owner of the garden, God reserved one tree within it.

He left one thing to symbolize his unique role. One tree stood in the midst of the garden as a monument to God's rightful authority over humanity.

One tree stood there to remind the man of what Psalm 100 says. Know that the Lord, he is God. It is he who made us and not we ourselves.

[29 : 14] We are his people, the sheep of his pasture. You see, in the Old Testament, the phrase, the knowledge of good and evil, it's used a few times.

And it means the authority to decide independently what is good and evil. So it talks about children who are too young to know good and evil, that is to have the responsibility to decide between good and evil.

It talks about the king as one who discerns good and evil. Right? It's speaking about authority to determine independently what is good and evil. And so the tree of the knowledge of good and evil represented God's authority to determine the moral boundaries of human existence.

Honoring God's tree by not eating from it was an expression of trusting God's goodness and accepting our creaturely status and honoring God's authority over us.

You see, part of the reality of being a finite creature is that we do not flourish when we attempt to live without any boundaries. All right?

[30 : 28] Try not setting any boundaries on your time by staying, try staying awake for three days straight. Pretty soon, you'll start hallucinating.

All right? If we don't live with some boundaries, I mean, there's all kinds of examples one could give. If we don't live with some boundaries, we very quickly fall off the edge. And here, God confronts us with the most fundamental boundary of all, the boundary between the almighty creator and a finite creature.

In other words, the tree was there to remind the man that God is God and we are not. God's boundaries are good.

They're even necessary for our creaturely existence and for our own flourishing. Third, God's consequences are entirely appropriate and fitting. In the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die.

This consequence is neither arbitrary nor excessive. For the man to eat from the one and only tree reserved for the one and only creator would be to utterly despise, reject, and seek to replace the one who had breathed life into him, who had planted the garden and provided so generously for him and who had installed him as the responsible guardian over it.

[31 : 58] If God is the ultimate life giver, any attempt to replace him or push him to the side is cutting off the branch that we are sitting on. It can only result in death.

See, God's commands to us are good. And even his most severe warnings are expressions of his deep care for us.

Is there a God who really cares? Genesis 2 says absolutely yes. From the very beginning we can see God is for us.

He's our heavenly father who made us intimately, who provides for us generously, and who instructs us wisely. And yet, some of us might say, but we are so far from the world described in Genesis 2.

Maybe we can admire the beauty and tranquility of the scene painted here, humanity at home with God, but we can only look upon it with wistful longing.

[33 : 13] It seems so far away from our own experience in this world.

Leon Kast wrote this in his commentary on this chapter. He wrote, no matter how sophisticated and civilized we have become, most of us respond to this portrait of our remotest past with something that feels like nostalgia.

With at least part of our souls, we long for a condition like this. Simple innocence and goodness, inner wholeness and spontaneity, lack of troublesome self-division and corrosive self-consciousness, being at home in the world.

Is there a way back into this paradise that we have lost? Is there a way to reconnect with this God who is near and fatherly to know that he cares for me and for us today?

And the New Testament answers that question with a resounding yes. John 3, 16, one of the most oft-quoted verses in the Bible says, God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him would not perish but have eternal life.

[34 : 37] Jesus Christ, the son of God, entered into a world that was nothing like the garden of Eden. He came into a world that was dark and hostile, full of conflict and anguish.

He came into a world under the sentence of death. He came to reconcile people to God and to bring them back into God's life-giving presence.

And in order to do this, he endured rejection and torture, betrayal, and mockery. He hung on a tree and bled and died. Is there a God who really cares?

Look at God's son himself hanging on a cross. Romans 8 says, he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Let us pray. Father, we thank you for this portrait that we see here of your tender care.

[35 : 54] That you, the almighty God, would draw near to us, breathing life into us, shaping and fashioning us in your own likeness, making a beautiful home for us to dwell with you and guiding us with your wise word.

Thank you that you have, that the same God that we see here in Genesis is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ whom we can rely on today.

Lord, fill us, we pray, by your spirit with the knowledge of your love and deep care for us that we would rest in you and delight in you and become the people that you have created and redeemed us to be.

in Jesus' name, amen.